

**Preliminary Amendment of U.S. National Stage for International Application  
PCT/EP2003/013563 Filed December 2, 2003**

**--ABSTRACT OF THE DISCLOSURE**

The disclosed invention relates to a countercurrent process for the continuous esterification of  $C_{1-22}$  (fatty) acids with  $C_{1-10}$  monoalkanols,  $C_{2-5}$  di- or trialkanols or mixtures thereof in the liquid phase in the presence of heterogeneous catalysts in a preliminary reactor (1) and in a reaction column (3), characterized in that the reaction column (3) is preceded by the preliminary reactor (1) and a separation unit (2) for the purpose of reducing the viscosity of the reaction mixture and removing the water of reaction from the system via a separation unit (2) to displace the reaction equilibrium before the reaction column (3). A further aspect of the invention concerns feeding nitrogen in at the lowermost plate of the reaction column (3) in order to increase the vapour load in the lower part of the reaction column.--

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